

The Church How Jesus Builds It

by Bob Hoekstra

The church is a living spiritual organism, made up of many members with Jesus as the head, and its purpose is to make disciples of all nations.

Duration: 1:04:24

Scripture: Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 1:22

Topics: "Church Growth", "Discipleship Ministry"

Description

This sermon delves into the topic of 'The Church, How Jesus Builds It,' emphasizing the importance of understanding the foundational scriptures outlining the nature, purpose, and function of the church. It contrasts man's methods of building the church with Jesus' promise to build His church, highlighting the need for the church to align with God's Word and rely on Jesus as the ultimate builder. The sermon also explores the significance of believers being equipped for ministry through the Word of God and the essential role of love in all aspects of ministry.

Transcript

Our study today, Lord willing, is to take one of our seminar overviews, The Church, How Jesus Builds It, and just sort of look at and meditate together on some of the highlight scriptures in the scripture outline. There are actually six headings in each of these overviews, and each one of those are extracted from a one hour of study on that topic that kind of is, you know, an all day or all weekend seminar. So Lord willing, we'll just touch on pieces of those as we go through.

And especially these days, The Church, How Jesus Builds It, it's a huge issue. Always has been a huge issue with God, you know, but every now and then all kinds of fads and fancies blow through the church world. A lot of them lose some of their enthusiasm, but very few of them lose their lasting impact.

There's always remnants of things. I was reading something the other day about a movement back in the early 1900s that still is around today with its remnant. And Lord willing, we'll be encouraged by these scripture, all built on this one great promise that Jesus made where he said in Matthew 16, 18, I will build my church.

Let's pray together, shall we? Lord, we're blessed to be in the family of God. We're so thankful for this great salvation we have. And Lord, you are good and you've won our hearts with your love.

And now we love you and we want to serve you and we want to do it according to your will. And that is clearly declared in the living, abiding word of God. So Lord, we ask you by your Holy Spirit to just pour out light and life and encouragement and edification, confirmation that we might be pleasing servants in your sight and that we might be a part of this tremendous age long plan you have to build your church, one Lord, one head, one church all around this globe.

And Lord, we yearn to be a part of that. And we know this is on your heart and you've put it on our hearts as well. So speak to us now by your spirit, through your word, we pray in Jesus name.

I will build my church, one of the great promises of God. Of course, the scriptures are filled with promises, you know, maybe seven, eight, nine, 10,000 different folks have had different counts. We know it's not a handful, it's an ocean full.

And this is one of the great ones. I will build my church. That's kind of why we call this a series of scriptures, the church how Jesus builds it.

The definite trend in the church world these days, you could summarize as the church how man builds it. I mean, you have books and seminars and movements on how to make it happen, basically, you know, how to get the size church you want, with the budget you want, with the fame and acclaim and influence you want. It's in fact, it's a big business really, just the communicating of how man is going to attend to the developing of the church.

And often there's good motivation behind it, but not always, not always. There are those whose motivation is not heavenly, but earthly. But of course, that's not going to be used of God to build his church.

And others are well-intended and have very strong motivations. They want to please and serve God and help people. But sometimes they have overlooked one strategic thing.

What does the Word of God say on this subject? There's all kinds of traditions, there's all kinds of approaches, and man can build amazing organizations and institutions, and even paste the name of the Lord on them. However, only in the Word of God are we going to find out how the Lord builds his church. And Jesus is the builder, not man, not man.

Man's way has kind of been to the seeker-sensitive, user-friendly church has been exceedingly popular. It's growing greatly. It's the predominating move in the American church world and in many places overseas as well, especially in Europe and even reading some from South America where there's an exploding revival.

But we not only want the power of God at work, we want the plan of God at work. And what a great place to stand as a biblical launching pad. I will build my church.

Jesus is the builder of the church. Where do we fit in? We are the instruments that he wants to use in the building of his church. It's an absolute certainty he's going to do it.

The question is, will we be a part of it? And we know the Lord wants to use his saints in the building of his church. Nature, purpose, and function is our first of six considerations here. The nature of the church, the purpose of the church, and the function of the church.

The word in the middle there, purpose, much great attention given to that these days. A purpose-driven perspective. Of course, we want to be purpose-guided and the purposes be the word of God.

Driven, I don't know, we want to be motivated by the Spirit. Spirit-driven, Scripture-led. But there's something even bigger than purpose.

There's something primary to purpose, and that is nature. What is the nature of the church? It's great to get aimed in the right direction, and the word will give us that direction. But there's an underlying issue, it's a bit more subtle, but even way more important than purpose.

No hope of fulfilling the purpose unless we understand and yield to and cooperate with God in what he describes as the nature of the church. Yes, we want to say, Lord, what is the reason for the church being here? What are we to be aiming at? But before that, we want to know, what is the church? If we err on the nature of the church, it doesn't matter what we state as the purpose, we're going to miss it, because we're operating out of the very essence of the being of the body of Christ. Ephesians 1, 22 and 23, a great set of verses on the nature of the church, answering the question, what is the church? Is it a building? Is it an organization? Those are two misconceptions about the church, and in biblical essence, the church is neither one of those two, actually.

Ephesians 1, 22, and he, the father, and he put all things under his feet, Jesus' feet, and gave him, Jesus, to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. This is one of those places where insight on the nature of the church is just packed into two brief verses. There are particularly four terms here, three words and then one phrase, that give great insight on what the church is.

Of course, the very word church is insightful. Church, ecclesia, the called out people of God, a term to describe a group of people called out by someone to some given purposes. Put that in the scriptures, in the mouth of the Lord, as it were, church means the called out people of God, called out of the world by the Lord to himself.

Kind of made up of just, you know, verb and a preposition, to call and then out of. We're the called out people of God. You'd think that that would be so fundamental to everyone in the church world, especially those who are seriously engaged in the development of the church.

You'd think that'd be so fundamental, that the primary thing on our heart when we think of the church is the people of God. That's what the Lord thinks of and the very term he used to describe the church is not a building or an organization or an operation. It's a people gathered in his name.

I know when I was a young pastor in the mid 1960s, I must say I thought more about the building, the operation and the organization than I did the people. And it wasn't that I didn't love the people. I was just kind of fogged out on priorities, you know.

And people are talking church and I'm thinking, yeah, we got to pay for that building. We got to clean that building. We got to fill that building.

My mistake, my mistake. And many have that same confusion in the church world today. The church, the very term gets at the question, what is the church? And here's a huge one, simple but so profound, body.

The Father gave Jesus to be head over all things to the church, which is his body. This is the same exact term used to describe the physical body. In fact, in so many places in scripture, here in Ephesians, elsewhere in Romans 12, certainly 1 Corinthians 12 and other places, this term appears.

And the point in some of them is that you can illustrate unseen realities of the body of Christ by just considering a human body. I mean, it's that kind of term. And that's a great thing of the Lord because so much of the essence of the church is an unseen reality.

And the fact that there's only one church all around the world, I mean, that's a staggering thought, but it's absolutely biblically sound. There aren't millions of churches except in the sense of local expressions of the church. There's one church.

And you think of that, this, you know, to us it's an invisible church in a sense. We only see those that we kind of gather with and fellowship with and communicate with. But this worldwide church is one body.

And it's a body. Oh, there are many members to the body of Christ now. Who knows how many hundreds of millions of members in the church, the true church, the body of Christ.

And there's a great analogy there because a human body, untold members, some microscopic, fearfully and wonderfully made. Well, that's just a little picture of the body of Christ. But think of it.

A body, that's what the church is. That's her nature. Oh, this is huge.

It cuts against a general perception that the church is a religious organization. It is not. It is a living spiritual organism.

The difference, you could hardly even stress the magnitude of the difference. The body of Christ, a living spiritual organism, like a human body, alive, many, many, many members, but one unit and every member sharing the same common life. What is that life in the body of Christ that we all share? The life of Christ, Colossians 3, 4, Christ who is our life.

Jesus said, I came that you might have life and you might have it more abundantly. The church is a living spiritual organism. It's not a dead religious organization.

Now, there are all kinds of dead religious organizations around the world. And there are a lot of them in Christendom. That is that realm of the religious world for people named some kind of allegiance to the name of Christ.

But that's not what God is building. That's what man is building. What Jesus is building is his church, which is his body.

And, you know, people say, well, wait a minute, the church has got to be an organization because they organize and they're always trying to organize better. Well, they're overlooking one great truth about an organism. And that is that organisms get organized as well.

But they do it on a totally different principle from an organization. An organization is kind of done by man and fiat and committee. An organism gets organized by the development of life.

So when our individual lives are nurtured, and we are helping as instruments of the Lord in the nurture of the saints, that is not only bringing the church to stronger fullness of life, but it also is organizing it. You

know, why do our hands come out of our wrists and not out of our ears? Because the life that they were growing on brought them to the place they were to be, able to function as they're supposed to function. There's nothing like this anywhere in creation, spiritually speaking, religiously speaking.

This is only true of what the Lord Jesus is doing as he builds his church. Everything other than that, whether it's in or out of Christendom, is just a dead religious organization. What hope that gives.

Hey, we just need to see the life nurtured that's in Christ, and we'll be growing individually and collectively more and more into what he wants us to be. Head, that's a huge term. It's obvious that every body needs a head, and the head is to be in charge.

And you only need one head for one body. In fact, you must only have one, unless you want a monstrosity, you know. And we certainly have created monstrosities in the religious world, you know, something that that do not rightly portray the Lord, his plan, or his church.

And the great thing is, Jesus is the head. Just as our physical head should be in charge of the operation of our physical body, so Jesus should be in charge of the church. And it doesn't matter whether we're gathered or scattered.

The church is who we are. It's not a place we meet or something we do. It's who we are.

And he is to be in charge at home and work and play and ministry, gathered, scattered, whatever. We're still the body of Christ, and he's the head. And oh, how we need Jesus to function as the head.

Where do leaders fit in? Well, they above all must be committed to the fact that Jesus is the boss, you know. If leaders aren't committed to it, who is going to be? Who is going to encourage and help others to walk that path? What a hope that gives, you know. Jesus in charge, and we yielding individually and corporately our lives to him.

Lord, your will, your way, your work. What a vitality that gives to a Christian and to a gathered church of Christians. And then fullness.

Here's a description of the church. His body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. The worst thing that could ever happen to a church is to be full of itself.

And just like people can get full of themselves, that used to sort of be a kind of a derogatory remark, you know. The problem with that guy is he's just full of himself. Of course, now it's a cultural virtue, you know.

Look how that guy's filled himself up with himself, you know. And we go to his seminar and find out how to do it ourselves, you know. But what could be worse for a church than to be full of itself? It's thoughts all about itself.

It's message all about itself. What it offers to others is just being full of itself. A kind of self-sufficiency, corporately implanted.

No, the church in God's plan is to be the fullness of him who fills all in all. Makes you think of Colossians 3:11, Christ our all in all. Christ in all of us, wanting to fill all of us.

It makes you think of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Oh, this is the path for a fruitful, full-lived pilgrim. And this is the path for a church that is full of the presence of God.

The fullness of him. Can you picture individual Christians seeking the Lord's fullness, wanting to be filled with his Holy Spirit, wanting to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ, and have his life just permeate all they say and do. What a life that is going to be developing.

Okay, bring all of that together as a local expression of the universal church. Boy, is that not going to be a healthy, vibrant, fruitful, effective, developing church body? Absolutely so. God help us to be filled individually with the presence and life of the Lord by seeking him humbly, and then encourage other saints to the same.

And when we gather, our attention is on the one in whom the fullness resides, the Lord Jesus Christ. And empty, hungry hearts will be ravenous for that reality. That's some on the nature of the church, telling us what the church is.

Now, what is the church described like this? What is her purpose? What is she to be aiming at? What is the reason that she's here and not already translated to glory? Well, there are certainly some very generic answers to that. We're here to glorify God, please God, serve God, and you can find verses for all of those in abundance. But there's a more specific purpose.

What does really glorify God? What pleases him? How do we really serve him? Well, it's caught in one of the greatest and rightly tagged scriptures in the Bible, Matthew 28, 19. We call it, I think very rightly, the Great Commission. The as opposed to a or others, the definite article, the primary overarching command of the Lord, the Great Commission, that which arches over everything the church is to be engaged in.

Go make disciples. That's our purpose. Go make disciples.

Our purpose is not churching the unchurched, making people feel comfortable and entertained at church. Our purpose is making disciples. Followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who are willing to say no to self, death to self, and have their only hope of a day-by-day developing life be in their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, Luke 9, 23. If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. We're to go out and see that people become that through the gospel, and then the ongoing work of the Lord.

We're to make disciples. In many places in the church world, the word disciple is kind of disappearing. It's probably because it sounds too much like discipline.

You know, like, oh, someone might be wanting to change me. Yes, and that someone is God. And if we're honest before God, we ought to be thrilled, praise the Lord, that the Lord God wants to change our lives.

How desperately we have needed that from the beginning, and we'll need it every day right up until glory. Being disciples, that's the purpose of the church. Well, then what is the function of the church? That is, what should be the characteristic activities of the church, which obviously should be that which fulfills the purpose? There are a lot of things that maybe churches, maybe they have liberty to do, but sometimes they're very hard to see how they have a direct connection with the purpose of the church, you know? I mean, okay, Thursday night bingo, you know? Not that it's an abomination before the Lord, but how much time are you going to spend on that, you know? And are you even going to make place in the public schedule of the corporate life of the church for such things? Not that there aren't things that we have liberty to enjoy individually or together, but when we're talking about the nature of the church, who we are, and then the function of the church, what's our reason for being here? And you see that it's a living

spiritual organism growing outward to make disciples, becoming and helping others become disciples.

You want to stay engaged with those things that fulfill the purpose. And of course, that's the great commission, Matthew 28, 19, and 20. Go make disciples of all the nations.

Two aspects to disciple making. Jesus gave them immediately in the commission, baptizing and teaching, evangelism and edification, getting the gospel out so people can take a stand of identification with the Lord Jesus Christ. New birth, new life.

And then teaching them to observe everything that the Lord Jesus has taught, has said. Teaching them the ways of the Lord in the word of the Lord. And then that great, comforting declaration at the end, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

The Lord didn't come from heaven above, come down and purchase our salvation, go back to the right hand of the Father, pour out the spirit, then just kind of say, okay, here's new life. Now you're off on the ocean of life on your own. Aim straight and row hard.

No, he says, I am with you. I'll never leave you nor forsake you. That's our great hope of seeing this great commission fulfilled.

Nature, purpose, function, God has addressed it so clearly in his word. Our second consideration, it's an elaboration on a couple of terms we've already looked at, but they're that important. That is the head and the body, Ephesians 4.16. The head and the body.

This relational reality is central to all of life and ministry as the church. Everything that is seen and heard in the individual or corporate life of the church has this unseen reality behind it. The head and the body, Jesus the head, us the body of Christ, Ephesians 4.16. From whom the whole body joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

There's the developing, edifying growth of the body of Christ. And look where it starts in this verse. From whom the whole body.

Jesus Christ as the head is not only in charge and has authority, but also as our all in all, he has everything we need every day. He is the life we're called to live. And from him, everyone in the body of Christ must be learning how to find what is in him that we can draw upon by faith.

From whom the whole body. No one can do this for us. Others can help speak to us about it.

They can demonstrate the reality of it before us, but they can't do it. You know, you can't hire someone to stay in touch with the Lord Jesus for you. In a lot of the religious world, that's what happens, though.

No, I don't read the Bible. I don't pray. I don't talk to other people about God.

I mean, that's what we have the pastor, the priest, the rabbi for. Or the practitioner. A lot of terms.

Hey, that's his job. Not so. Oh, the pastor better be staying in close touch with Jesus day by day.

But he can't do that for someone else. He can do that and bring blessing to someone else. But the greatest blessing of all is teaching that person.

Seek the Lord Jesus Christ. Draw near to the Lord Jesus Christ. Abide in Christ.

Commune with him. Learn of him. Press hard after him.

Stay close with him. He's the source. He's the source of everything the body of Christ needs.

From whom the whole body. So thankful on a physical plane that at least thus far in my pilgrimage, all of my body is related to the head. There are some short circuits now and then, but it's all related to the head.

That's the way it's supposed to be. It's the way it's supposed to be. Well, that's just a little analogy.

Can you imagine if anything in our body became out of touch with the head? How disastrous that would be. Think of it spiritually. How disastrous that those in the body of Christ are not living in a vital, true, practical, personal, ongoing daily relationship of communion and trust and fellowship with the Lord.

From whom the whole body joined and knit together by what every joint supplies. The church is the body of Christ. The Lord wants to join us together, not have us separated from one another.

But he not only wants to join us together, he wants to knit us together. The members of our body are not just adjacent to one another. They are interwoven in one unit.

So it is with the body of Christ. The Lord wants to join us and then knit us together. And he does it by what every joint supplies.

He does it through the one another relationships of the body of Christ. Physical bodies have joints. That very term is applied here to the spiritual body of Christ.

It's another simple term, but profound in implication. If you take an elbow, say, in a human body, which is a pretty easy joint to sort of observe and consider, it's obvious what it is. It's the place where one member, the lower arm, relates to another member, the upper arm, under the headship instruction of the Lord.

And think on the human analogy of the benefit to our whole physical body that that one joint brings every day. It's feeding the whole body. Such a simple reality.

But what's the implication in the church world? When any one Christian is willing to relate to another Christian jointly under the headship of Christ to serve and please him, you have a functioning spiritual joint in the body of Christ. And the extent of that just goes beyond imagination or comprehension. But it brings it right down to the most simple relationship.

One Christian relating to another Christian under the headship of Christ to walk in his way and his will by the work of his Holy Spirit. And the whole body benefits knit together by what every joint supplies according to the effective working by which every part does it share. That's the way it works in a human body.

So it is to be in the body of Christ. This causes the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. You know, this is an absolutely profound spiritual plan God has.

But it is not complicated. It is profound out of sight. It's more profound than a human body is.

And it is profoundly created. It just boils down to individual Christians living under the headship of Christ and then joining up together in fellowship and service in Christ. What happens? The body develops.

It's edified. It's built up. Colossians 2.19, similar verse that adds one other phrase.

Colossians 2.19, there were some in Colossae who were, quote, not holding fast to the head. Obviously, the other side of this warning is we must be holding fast to the head. So let's just read that for our own path and exhortation.

Holding fast to the head, from whom all the body. Okay, that's the same as Ephesians 4.16. Holding fast to the head, leaning on the Lord, pursuing the Lord, crying out to the Lord, calling upon the name of the Lord, wanting to walk in the yoke with the Lord, the yoke of fellowship and service. Holding fast to the head, from whom, again, he's the supply of all that all the body needs, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

The word that's added here is ligaments. In a human body, what are the ligaments? They are those strong bands that hold joints in place. If a human body did not have ligaments, just joints, oh, the limitation on its functionality.

What you could lift, how you could use and turn, the pressure would snap, pop the joint out of place. What are the ligaments in the body of Christ? What holds those one another relationships in the body of Christ in place so they don't pop out of joint? Strong bonds of Christ-like love developed between the two. It is amazing sometimes how little pressure it takes to pop out the joint of relationship between two Christians.

Pastors certainly know of that. People can just be devoted in love and thanksgiving to the calling God has given to a pastor, and participate in it and be blessed. Oh, they've found a home on this planet, and it's in the body of Christ, and it's in this church.

You're the shepherd, and I'm the sheep. This is phenomenal. Six weeks or six months later, you're anathema.

And when you get to the bottom of this disastrous change, it turns out it was that Sunday when you were about dying. You could hardly walk among the living, and you didn't happen to say hello to this person. They didn't even know that you were entombed.

They thought because you're walking, you're doing great. Pop, it's all over. But you know, when there are strongly developed bonds of Christ-like love, oh, that relationship, that joint, that one another bond can take all kinds of pressure.

Hey, okay, things are not going perfect. Okay, maybe something was said or done wrong. Okay, but you know what? That's my brother.

I love him. He loves me. We both love the Lord.

We're going to learn something through this. Those ligaments in the body of Christ are irreplaceable. A physical body without ligaments, so limited.

A local expression of the body of Christ without one another ligaments of Christ-like love. No wonder there's so many exhortations in Scripture to love one another, to love one another. The head and the body, Christ the head, we the body of Christ, our relationship with him, our relationships with one another, these are our core fundamental to ongoing individual pilgrimage and then the growth and service of the body of Christ together.

Everything that God wants us engaged in is going to have to be standing on and walking in the reality of those two things. Jesus the head, us the body of Christ. And then in all of that, gifts and fruit in ministry.

Gifts and fruit in ministry. First Peter 4.11. Gifts and fruit. In first Corinthians 12 we're told that our spiritual gifts tell us what basic part and position and role we have in the body of Christ.

There it talks about spiritual gifts and then it starts to run the parallel with parts of the body. The eye, the ear, the nose, and you can go on hand, foot and all of that. Those are all analogous to the spiritual gifts mentioned there.

So the spiritual gifts, and we all have one or more, given to each one individually as the Lord wills, that determines our primary contributing role in the body of Christ. If you have the gift of mercies, you might be seen as the hand in the body, lending a helping hand. If you have a teaching gift, you might be likened to the tongue or the mouth.

If you, the smelling, that's one of the, the nose, the smelling, you might have gift of discernment, you know, that stinks. But that tells us our place in the body of Christ. Not that we aren't responsible to live far beyond that precise role, but that will be our consistent, persistent, primary contribution to life in the body of Christ.

And there's a great summary on spiritual gifts in 1 Peter 4, 10, and 11. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Each one has received a gift, that's the truth.

And as, or since each one has received a gift, by the way, we receive these, we don't earn them, as each one has received the gift, minister it, serve one another with it, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. The stewardship of Christians, it's huge. It's not just finances, it's time, it's relationships, it's family, it's work.

And here, part of our stewardship is the spiritual gift or gifts the Lord has given us. They're the Lord's and they're given to us to share in during our life here on earth. And we're to use that which came from the Lord for the purpose, pleasure, honor, and glory of the one who gave them and who really owns them, the Lord.

And look at this, spiritual gifts, stewardship, good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Have you noticed in the scriptures that spiritual gifts are grace gifts? One of the great words in all of the New Testament, Charis, our oldest grandchild of 11, 17, her name is Charissa. That's how you would transliterate Charis into English.

We love that. We love that. Every time we see her, we think, grace.

Yeah, grace. It's all about grace, Bob. Don't forget, it's grace upon grace.

Charis, well, spiritual gifts, Charismata, from which we've gotten a term that kind of took a twist on some of these things, Charismatic, and really took a turn in what you maybe call Charismania, but it's a great word. It's a reminder that spiritual gifts are like intentionally divinely packaged endowments of grace to a given end. Gift, enablement by God to function in a certain way.

And we are stewards of the manifold grace of God, the many faceted aspects of the grace of God. In 1 Corinthians 12, it talks about there being spiritual gifts, but one Lord. And then it talks about there being

many ministries that come out of those gifts.

So every gift can produce all kinds of ministries, gifts of evangelism, all kinds of evangelistic ministries. In each ministry, it says there are diverse activities, but the same God who works all in all. You get kind of a multiplication, an exponential curve of the possibilities of the blendings of gifts, then ministries, then activities coming out of each ministry.

No wonder there's such potential for creativity in the body of Christ. All this comes from the creator of all, including all the universe, including every part of the human body, the analogy here so often. And we are stewards of that, given that grace and its many faceted aspects to serve God with and bless others.

Now, the rest of the summary, verse 11, if anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies. So here the gifts are broken down into two general categories, speaking gift, and maybe you could say a word for the other one would be action gift.

If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. You have a teaching gift or a prophetic gift, preaching gifts. If anyone has a speaking gift, let him speak as the oracles of God.

If our gift is speaking, let it be used in declaring the word of God, the oracles of God. Let it be in line with the word. Let it be anchored in the word.

Let it be permeated by the word. Speaking gift means God wants to use us to say things. He wants us to talk.

What are we going to say? What are we going to talk about? Brothers, it's right here, isn't it? It's the word of God. Early on when I was pastoring, I was so often trying to think of something to say. You know, here comes Sunday, here come the people, they're expecting me to say something.

And early in those years, though by the grace of God, I probably said a few things right because I did open the Bible and read it. But I was always trying to think of something to say. You know, as the years went by, and the Lord kind of convicted me that, you know, Bob, it's not about what you have to say.

It's about what I've already said. Just get familiar with that, meditate prayerfully in it, and just let your talking be thoughts I lay on your heart, unfolding that, elaborating on that, restating it, the same thing said in many ways, you know. The oracles of God, if we have a speaking gift, and many in the body do.

It's not just a pastor or teacher. Many have speaking gifts. Only we exhort them.

Let it be as it were the oracles of God. Let it be the head speaking through a member of his body to another member of the body. And then the action gifts.

If anyone ministers or serves like help gifts or something like that, let him do that or let him do it as with the ability which God supplies. If we have speaking gifts, let it be the speaking of God through his word. If we have action gifts, let us do it with the ability which God supplies.

So whether it's word or deed, it's God at work in his body. And look, of course, where that is going to lead. Verse 11, middle of verse, that in all things, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever.

Amen. One of the great things to help the body of Christ bring glory to the Lord is to learn that the speaking gifts are that God's word might be spoken. And the action gifts is that God's ability and strength and provision and protection and help might be offered to others in his name.

In other words, it's God at work. No wonder God is to be glorified in all things. You know, in the world, if you speak and you speak well, you get glorified.

Or if you take phenomenal action and people are blessed and helped and impressed, you get the glory. Well, it was a human being working and maybe there was some, you know, common grace blessing in that, sure. But in the church, where's the glory to go? It's all to go to the Lord.

And he is to get the glory because he truly is the one who's to be enabling the speaking and the action ministry. Well, the priority of fruit. You remember at the end of 1 Corinthians 12, and yet I show you a more excellent way, a more excellent way.

What is more excellent than these giftings of God, which are graciously giftings and allows God through them to be at work in us and getting glory for himself and blessing for others? What could be greater than that? Oh, something so great that without it, all the rest just becomes a noisy nothing. In fact, you know, those first three verses in 1 Corinthians 13, it speaks of phenomenal gifts, tongues of men and of angels, of miracle working faith, martyrdom, sacrificing life faith. And yet it all amounts to someone just banging on a noisy cymbal.

It amounts to nothing. Noisy is the end of verse 1, nothing, nothing, the ends of verse 2 and 3. Without what? Love. Without love.

Love is fruit. The fruit of the spirit is love. The gifts are an enablement of capability to function.

Fruit is character. Well, you have great enabling from God without the character of Christ, the love of God at work, you've got a disaster waiting to happen. Better someone that doesn't have a clue what their gift is and are just swallowed up in the love of God.

Everywhere they turn, they're going to bless people. And you know what? Eventually, they'll find their greatest joy and effectiveness in the very gift God has given them. But without love, a noisy nothing is what comes from the capabilities that God's willing to impart to his people.

And all of that, of course, is brought to bear in ministry to the church and ministry to the world. Just a couple of brief words about those. First, ministry to the church.

You can call it one another ministry. First Thessalonians 5:11. One another ministry.

Therefore, comfort each other and edify one another just as you also are doing. In ministry to the church, it's one to another, one believer to another, but it's reciprocal, one another. I minister to you, you minister to me.

It's not just one way. And the more each grows, the more it can become two-way. You know, this is one of the phenomenal callings for every believer.

Through the years, many folks came to me when I was pastoring in local churches, 14 years and 11 years. Those 25 years, I don't know how many people came. Pastor, I'm looking for ministry.

And often, they were asking to be a part of the usher team or counseling team or the women's ministry, men's, whatever. I need a ministry. And sometimes, it was newly saved, highly motivated, loving the Lord, wanting to be a blessing in the name of the Lord.

And they just wanted a ministry. And in their understanding, it had to be a position and someone appointing them to it. As the years went by, the Lord taught me more and more, help them start out in one another ministry.

You know, just take them to some or a bunch of the one another passages. Love one another, encourage one another, pray for one another, bear one another's burdens, be kind to one another, receive one another. Here, comfort one another, edify one another, and explain those, and then say to them, rightly so.

There's your ministry. Go for it. You can minister 150 years on these things, and it can only just keep growing and growing.

And really, those who function in those relational ministries, which must never stop in our lives, they are the ones increasingly prepared to take maybe a designated, appointed, sometimes titled role that helps people find them and know they've been encouraged by leadership or whatever. But what a huge vision of ministry this is. In the church, if we just minister to one another, we're going to have phenomenal ministry, the Lord will be glorified, and we'll be growing together as the body of Christ.

Of course, the ultimate one another ministry is loving one another. First John 4, 7. Love one another. And of course, repeated so many times in the scripture.

In fact, if we are really growing and loving one another, all of the other one another ministries are going to be developing, because love wants to help, and love wants God's best for that person, and love wants to be an instrument of God's best for that person. You could summarize the one another ministry to the church, love one another. That should even be the motivation on what seems to some unloving, rebuke one another, admonish one another.

Sometimes that's necessary, but you can certainly see futility in that if it's not done in love. You can shred somebody with a true admonishment, but without a desire for God's best for that person, and it'd be restorative and all, it just becomes alienating, decimating, dividing. Well, ministry to the world.

Ministry to the world, basically you can categorize into witness and evangelism. One is sort of who you are, the other is a task you undertake. Matthew 5, 13 through 16, Jesus said, you're the salt of the earth, you're the light of the world.

You are, it's who we are in Christ. Of course, he's the one who salts us with his righteous life, and he is the light that lights our lamp, as David put it in the Psalms. We're lamps, but lamps need a power source, you know, and he's the one that enlightens us, and shines light on us, and in us, and then through us, and that's our witness, and every believer is called to that.

You are followers of Jesus, you are salt and light. Salt holds back decay. Salt stirs, provokes, stimulates thirst, and we're to be that as the children of the Lord, and in him, we can grow in that.

And light, the only thing that deals with darkness is light. You can curse the darkness, you can kick at it, you can try to run from it, you can try maybe all kinds of imaginative things, but just one little flip of the switch, if there's a light available, the darkness flees, and we're the light of the world, and that's our

ministry to the world, and every Christian is called to that. But what we hope will happen along the way, what we're praying about along the way, is that our ministry of salt and light will open the door for doing the work of an evangelist.

Now if you have the gift of evangelism, you're driven all the more, you're the more highly motivated that your role as witness of the reality of Christ will open the door to share the gospel of Christ. But as Paul wrote to Timothy, who was a pastor, not an evangelist, do the work of an evangelist. We can all do the work of an evangelist, and we hope that our witness will culminate in the opportunity to share the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And of course, Acts 8, 1, 4, 5, and 12 was when one of the first great revivals started there, kind of mass evangelism, Acts 8, 1. Now Saul was threatening, was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose, and then people, the believers, were chased out of town, as it were, to many regions nearby. Verse 4, they went everywhere preaching the word.

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. It's one thing to be salt and light, but eventually there needs to be the preaching of Christ. People can be convicted, and touched, and drawn, and stirred by salt and light witness, and praise the Lord for that.

That's huge. But eventually Christ has to be proclaimed, and he preached Christ to them. And the result, verse 12, when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God in the church, men and women were baptized.

Many came to the Lord Jesus Christ. One last reflection for just a couple of minutes. How is the church to grow in these things, develop in these realities, become more and more effective in not only understanding, but applying and walking in these realities? How are the saints going to get equipped for ministry? Well, often the church has sent them off somewhere.

And not that, again, there is not that there isn't Christian liberty for people to go a certain place to get more help in equipping for ministry. But here's something that is a reality, and is available for every Christian. Being equipped for ministry, Ephesians 4, 11 and 12, we're reminded this is to take place in the church.

Sure, a Bible college, especially out of churches, can be a supplemental help. Seminaries, if you can ever find one that is just totally anchored in the Word, focused on the Lord Jesus Christ, could be of help. Maybe the psalm at a given time.

But those are not essentialities. What's essential? That the church be equipping the saints for the work of ministry, Ephesians 4, 11 and 12. And he himself, the Lord Jesus, gave some members of the body of Christ to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.

And what are these leadership gifts given for? Contemporarily, they'd be sort of like missionaries, and prophetic discernment ministries, and evangelistic ministries, and then the combined gift, that word some is only repeated four times, last time it's connected with a connected gift, a united gift, pastors and teachers, pastor-teacher gift, which I think is especially what leader, senior, or primary responsibility pastors in a congregation would have. It might be teachers in the church, it might be those with a pastoral, caring, loving heart in the church. But those who are going to lead the church and lead the leaders, I think this is the primary combination they need.

They need to be pastor-teachers. But for what? For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Every Christian is called to full-time ministry.

What they might not be called to is vocational ministry, where their ministry becomes their employment and job. The saints, that's every Christian, they're to be equipped in the church for the work of ministry. Christians do not have an option of whether they're going to serve God or not.

We're all called to serve God our whole life. We might serve Him as a parent, as a grandparent, in a neighborhood prayer group. There might be all kinds of ways we serve Him.

Our primary service might be on the job, witness, then evangelism, and taking the lunch, and discipling people there. All of us are called to ministry. Some are called to vocational ministry.

Most are called to what would be tent-making ministry, which even the Apostle Paul undertook in many seasons of his ministry. The church is to be equipping the saints for the work of ministry. Saints, you can't get a more generic term than that.

You can't get a more universal term than saints. It ranks right there with brethren, believers. It includes every Christian.

Christian. Well, how are we going to be equipping the saints in the church? And we'll close with these two verses. Through the Word.

Through the Word. 2 Timothy 3, 16, and 17. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that, to this end, that the man of God may be complete, and here's our issue of implication, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Thoroughly equipped for every good work. The Word of God is authoritative. It's inspired.

Here we're told also it's sufficient. It's enough to equip the saints for every good spiritual calling God might have for their lives. If God leads them to some other kind of specialized training, there's certainly the latitude, the freedom, but the Word of God is sufficient to equip, outfit, prepare, develop the saints for every good work.

Because it's inspired, it's profitable. Oh, the ability of the Word of God. It's not will we be able to live up to the Word, it's will we bow down to the Word, meekly receive it, and let it change our lives.

It's the Scriptures are able. They're profitable, able to bring a benefit in doctrine, that's teaching of the ways of the Lord. Able to reprove us, tell us when we're off base, wandering in a ditch.

Profitable for correction, get us back on track. And then last, for instruction in righteousness, helping us move on down the way of righteousness with the Lord. Letting the Word work that way in us will thoroughly equip us for every good work.

The Lord hasn't overlooked how to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. He's built it right into His revelation on the church and how she is to function. You know, those are just a few Scriptures, but I think they catch a flavor of this grand theme in the Bible, the church, how Jesus builds it.

This is how Jesus fulfills His promise when He said, I will, I will, I will build my church. Let's pray together. Lord, we're so thankful for Your promises, for Your revelations, for Your Word, for Your insight.

Lord, we just want to embrace the truth of Your Word on the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray for these days when man's fingerprints are kind of all over everything in the church world. We just long to have again a fresh outpouring of the Spirit of God from above, a true revival, heaven-sent, Jesus-centered, Bible-anchored, Holy Spirit-empowered.

Lord, may we be a part of it as You build Your church. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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